

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814



April 22, 1999

ALL-COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-31-99

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL PUBLIC ADOPTION AGENCIES
ALL CDSS ADOPTION DISTRICT OFFICES
ALL LICENSED PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCIES

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- ☒ State Law Change
- ☐ Federal Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Court Order
- ☐ Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- ☐ Initiated by CDSS

SUBJECT: CHANGES IN CALIFORNIA STATUTE REGARDING TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS WHEN THE CHILD IS A JUVENILE COURT DEPENDENT IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

This notice is to inform you of recent changes in California statute regarding termination of parental rights when the child is a juvenile court dependent in out-of-home placement. Effective January 1, 1999, California statute requires that, absent compelling reasons to the contrary, agencies must initiate actions to terminate parental rights if reunification efforts have failed.

The statute further requires completion of foster care case reviews by county welfare departments no later than July 1, 2000. The statute requires that at least one-third of the cases be reviewed by July 1, 1999 and at least two-thirds of the cases be reviewed by January 1, 2000.

Background

Under the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89), adoption is the preferred permanent plan for children whose parents are ineligible for reunification services or have failed to reunify despite available services. Specifically, the Act requires that states, absent compelling reasons to the contrary, initiate an action to terminate parental rights if the child has spent fifteen of the most recent twenty-two months in foster care.

Assembly Bill (AB) 2773, Chapter 1056, Statutes of 1998, California's implementation of Public Law 105-89, took effect on January 1, 1999. AB 2773 added Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16508.1 and amended WIC Sections 366.21, 366.22, 366.26, 366.3, and 16501.1 in order to meet the federal mandate.

The new California statutes affect both the development and form of each foster child's case plan, as well as the court's decision regarding that child's placement. A crucial element is the requirement that a case plan goal of long-term foster care shall not be established or maintained unless an adoption agency has determined there is a "compelling reason" why termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interest.

These changes affect all current and future foster children. The WIC Section 16501.1 case plan and the WIC Sections 366.21(f) and 366.22(a) hearing process regarding long-term foster care, as revised by AB 2773, will meet the federal requirements for children whose cases have not yet been reviewed at the twelve-month hearing required by WIC Section 366.21(f). This category of children includes children who enter foster care in the future. This process is discussed below under “New Cases.”

A special process is required for children for whom a goal of long-term foster care has already been established at a twelve-month or subsequent hearing. This process is discussed below under “Existing Cases.”

New Cases

The revised case plan and the long-term foster care decision process are interrelated. Neither can function without the other. They are discussed separately here only for clarity.

Case Plan: The twelve-month hearing required by WIC Section 366.21(f) is now called the “Permanency Hearing.” In preparation for the Permanency Hearing, the child welfare agency must revise the case plan to meet the new requirements of WIC Section 16501.1. The case plan revision will require the adoption agency’s active participation.

First, if the case plan goal at the time of the Permanency Hearing is not adoption, the case plan must include documentation of the “compelling reason” why termination of parental rights is not in the child’s best interests. The adoption agency must make the determination that such a compelling reason exists. Cases requiring documentation of compelling reasons include cases where the recommended case plan goal is reunification, guardianship, or long-term foster care. (See WIC Section 16501.1(f)(10). A copy of this statute and other statutes referenced in this notice is attached.)

Second, if the case plan goal is adoption, the case plan must include specific description of the steps being taken to implement the plan. (See WIC Section 16501.1(f)(13).)

If, at the Permanency Hearing, the court continued the case for further reunification services which were unsuccessful and the recommendation at the subsequent eighteen-month “Permanency Review Hearing” (i.e., the WIC Section 366.22 hearing) is not reunification, the case plan will require further revision, including adoption agency review, in preparation for the Permanency Review Hearing.

Long-term Foster Care Decision Process: Welfare and Institutions Code Sections 366.21 and 366.22 impose additional requirements regarding the evidence to be considered by the court before establishing a plan of long-term foster care at the Permanency (twelve-month) Hearing or the Permanency Review (eighteen-month) Hearing. The evidence now must include a recommendation by an adoption agency “that there is a compelling reason for determining that

a hearing held pursuant to [WIC] Section 366.26 is not in the best interest of the child because the child is not a proper subject for adoption and has no one willing to accept legal guardianship.” (See WIC Sections 366.21(g)(2) and 366.22(a).)

The intent of WIC Sections 366.21 and 366.22 is to reduce the number of children for whom plans of long-term foster care are established without a WIC Section 366.26 hearing. These revisions are consistent with the case plan modifications described above. Implementation will require that child welfare agencies seek, and adoption agencies provide, recommendations in a timely fashion when the child welfare agency believes that adoption or guardianship clearly would not be in the child’s best interest at that point in time.

Existing cases

WIC Section 16508.1(d) requires that the child welfare agency review all existing cases of children who have been in foster care for at least fifteen of the last twenty-two months. The review must be completed by July 1, 2000. The statute also sets deadlines. The first third of the caseload must be reviewed by July 1, 1999, and the second third must be reviewed by January 1, 2000. The cases of children who have been in foster care the longest are to be reviewed first.

The agency must recommend to the court that a WIC Section 366.26 hearing be held unless the case plan documents that:

1. an adoption agency has determined there are compelling reasons that it is unlikely the child will be adopted or that one of the conditions set forth in WIC Section 366.26(c)(1) applies;
2. a WIC Section 366.26 hearing has already been set;
3. there is a substantial probability of reunification within statutory time frames; or
4. reasonable reunification efforts have not been made or reasonable reunification services have not been offered. (See WIC Section 16508.1(b) and (c) for the full text of these exceptions.)

WIC Section 16508.1 does not address those cases where the review determines that guardianship, rather than adoption, is the appropriate plan. However, in such cases a recommendation to the court that a WIC Section 366.26 hearing be held to establish a guardianship would be appropriate and consistent with remaining requirements.

WIC Section 16508.1 does not specify the procedure to be used to recommend to the court that a WIC Section 366.26 hearing be held. However, child welfare agencies may be able to use the review process necessary to prepare the recommendations to the court for the WIC Section 366.3 hearing to meet this requirement by the dates specified above. This procedure is

permissible because the court, at a WIC Section 366.3 hearing, must order that a WIC Section 366.26 hearing be held unless the court determines that there is a compelling reason not to do so. Again, implementation will require close cooperation between child welfare and adoption agencies.

Please contact the Foster Care Placement Policy Unit at (916) 445-0183 or mhall@dss.ca.gov or the Adoptions Policy Bureau at (916) 322-4228 or rhemstre@dss.ca.gov if you have questions concerning termination of parental rights. Please contact the Adoptions Initiative Bureau at (916) 322-4227 or fschaezl@dss.ca.gov if you have questions regarding the case review process.

***Original Document Signed By
Wesley A. Beers on 4/22/99***

WESLEY A. BEERS
Acting Deputy Director
Children & Family Services Division

Attachments: WIC Section 366.21
WIC Section 366.22
WIC Section 366.26
WIC Section 366.3
WIC Section 16501.1
WIC Section 16508.1

c: CWDA

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 366.21

366.21. (a) Every hearing conducted by the juvenile court reviewing the status of a dependent child shall be placed on the appearance calendar. The court shall advise all persons present at the hearing of the date of the future hearing and of their right to be present and represented by counsel.

(b) Except as provided in Section 366.23 and subdivision (a) of Section 366.3, notice of the hearing shall be mailed by the social worker to the same persons as in the original proceeding, to the child's parent or guardian, to the foster parents, relative caregivers, community care facility, or foster family agency having physical custody of the child in the case of a child removed from the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian, and to the counsel of record if the counsel of record was not present at the time that the hearing was set by the court, by first-class mail addressed to the last known address of the person to be notified, or shall be personally served on those persons, not earlier than 30 days nor later than 15 days preceding the date to which the hearing was continued. Service of a copy of the notice personally or by certified mail return receipt requested, or any other form of actual notice is equivalent to service by first-class mail.

The notice shall contain a statement regarding the nature of the hearing to be held and any change in the custody or status of the child being recommended by the supervising agency. The notice to the foster parent, relative caregiver, or a certified foster parent who has been approved for adoption by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency shall indicate that the foster parent, relative caregiver, or a certified foster parent who has been approved for adoption by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency may attend all hearings or may submit any information he or she deems relevant to the court in writing.

(c) At least 10 calendar days prior to the hearing the social worker shall file a supplemental report with the court regarding the services provided or offered to the parent or guardian to enable him or her to assume custody and the efforts made to achieve legal permanence for the child if efforts to reunify fail, the progress made, and, where relevant, the prognosis for return of the child to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian, and make his or her recommendation for disposition. If the recommendation is not to return the child to a parent or guardian, the report shall specify why the return of the child would be detrimental to the child. The social worker shall provide the parent or guardian with a copy of the report, including his or her recommendation for disposition, at least 10 calendar days prior to the hearing. In the case of a child removed from the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian, the social worker shall provide a summary of his or her recommendation for disposition to the counsel for the child, any court-appointed child advocate, foster parents, relative caregivers, certified foster parents who have been approved for adoption by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency, community care facility, or foster family agency having the physical custody of the child at least 10 calendar days before the hearing.

(d) Prior to any hearing involving a child in the physical custody of a community care facility or foster family agency that may result in the return of the child to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian, or in adoption or the creation of a legal guardianship, the facility or agency shall file with the court a report containing its recommendation for disposition. Prior to the hearing involving a child in the physical custody of a foster parent, a relative caregiver, or a certified foster parent who has been approved for adoption by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency, the foster parent, relative caregiver, or the certified foster parent who has been approved for adoption by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency, may file with the court a report containing his or her recommendation for disposition. The court shall consider the report and recommendation filed pursuant to this subdivision prior to determining any disposition.

(e) At the review hearing held six months after the initial dispositional hearing, the court shall order the return of the child to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian unless the court finds, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the return of the child to his or her parent or guardian would create a substantial risk of detriment to the safety, protection, or physical or emotional well-being of the child. The social worker shall have the burden of establishing that detriment. The failure of the parent or guardian to participate regularly in court-ordered treatment programs shall be prima facie evidence that return would be detrimental. In making its determination, the court shall review and consider the social

worker's report and recommendations and the report and recommendations of any child advocate appointed pursuant to Section 356.5; and shall consider the efforts or progress, or both, demonstrated by the parent or guardian and the extent to which he or she availed himself or herself of services provided.

Evidence of any or all of the following circumstances shall not, in and of themselves, be deemed a failure to provide or offer reasonable services:

(1) The child has been placed with a foster family that is eligible to adopt a child, or has been placed in a preadoptive home.

(2) The case plan includes services to achieve legal permanence or the child if efforts to reunify fail.

(3) Services to achieve legal permanence for the child, if efforts to reunify fail, are provided concurrently with services to reunify the family.

Whether or not the child is returned to a parent or guardian, the court shall specify the factual basis for its conclusion that the return would be detrimental or would not be detrimental. The court also shall make appropriate findings pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 366; and where relevant, shall order any additional services reasonably believed to facilitate the return of the child to the custody of his or her parent or guardian. The court shall also inform the parent or guardian that if the child cannot be returned home by the 12-month permanency hearing, a proceeding pursuant to Section 366.26 may be instituted. This section does not apply in a case where, pursuant to Section 361.5, the court has ordered that reunification services shall not be provided.

If the child was under the age of three years on the date of the initial removal and the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the parent failed to participate regularly in any court-ordered treatment plan, the court may schedule a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 within 120 days. If, however, the court finds there is a substantial probability that the child, who was under the age of three years on the date of initial removal, may be returned to his or her parent or guardian within six months or that reasonable services have not been provided, the court shall continue the case to the 12-month permanency hearing.

If the child was removed initially under subdivision (g) of Section 300 and the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the whereabouts of the parent are still unknown, or the parent has failed to contact and visit the child, the court may schedule a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 within 120 days. If the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the parent has been convicted of a felony indicating parental unfitness, the court may schedule a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 within 120 days.

If the child had been placed under court supervision with a previously noncustodial parent pursuant to Section 361.2, the court shall determine whether supervision is still necessary. The court may terminate supervision and transfer permanent custody to that parent, as provided for by paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 361.2.

In all other cases, the court shall direct that any reunification services previously ordered shall continue to be offered to the parent or guardian pursuant to the time periods set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 361.5, provided that the court may modify the terms and conditions of those services.

If the child is not returned to his or her parent or guardian, the court shall determine whether reasonable services have been provided or offered to the parent or guardian which were designed to aid the parent or guardian in overcoming the problems which led to the initial removal and the continued custody of the child. The court shall order that those services be initiated, continued, or terminated.

(f) The permanency hearing shall be held no later than 12 months after the date the child entered foster care, as that date is determined pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 361.5. At the permanency hearing, the court shall determine the permanent plan for the child, that shall include a determination of whether the child will be returned to the child's home and, if so, when, within the time limits of subdivision (a) of Section 361.5. The court shall order the return of the child to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian unless the court finds, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the return of the child to his or her parent or guardian would create a substantial risk of detriment to the safety, protection, or physical or emotional well-being of the child. The social worker shall have the burden of establishing that detriment. The court shall also determine whether reasonable services have been provided or offered to the parent or guardian that were designed to aid the parent or guardian to overcome the problems that led to the initial removal and continued custody of the child. The failure of the parent or guardian to participate regularly in court-ordered treatment programs shall be prima facie evidence that return would

be detrimental. In making its determination, the court shall review and consider the social worker's report and recommendations and the report and recommendations of any child advocate appointed pursuant to Section 356.5; shall consider the efforts or progress, or both, demonstrated by the parent or guardian and the extent to which he or she availed himself or herself of services provided; and shall make appropriate findings pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 366.

Evidence of any or all of the following circumstances shall not, in and of themselves, be deemed a failure to provide or offer reasonable services:

(1) The child has been placed with a foster family that is eligible to adopt a child, or has been placed in a preadoptive home.

(2) The case plan includes services to achieve legal permanence for the child if efforts to reunify fail.

(3) Services to achieve legal permanence for the child, if efforts to reunify fail, are provided concurrently with services to reunify the family.

Whether or not the child is returned to his or her parent or guardian, the court shall specify the factual basis for its decision. If the child is not returned to a parent or guardian, the court shall specify the factual basis for its conclusion that the return would be detrimental. The court also shall make a finding pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 366.

(g) If the time period in which the court-ordered services were provided has met or exceeded the time period set forth in paragraph(1) or (2) of subdivision (a) of Section 361.5, as appropriate, and a child is not returned to the custody of a parent or guardian at the permanency hearing held pursuant to subdivision (f), the court shall do one of the following:

(1) Continue the case for up to six months for a permanency review hearing, provided that the hearing shall occur within 18 months of the date the child was originally taken from the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian. The court shall continue the case only if it finds that there is a substantial probability that the child will be returned to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian and safely maintained in the home within the extended period of time or that reasonable services have not been provided to the parent or guardian. For the purposes of this section, in order to find a substantial probability that the child will be returned to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian and safely maintained in the home within the extended period of time, the court shall be required to find all of the following:

(A) That the parent or guardian has consistently and regularly contacted and visited with the child.

(B) That the parent or guardian has made significant progress in resolving problems that led to the child's removal from the home.

(C) The parent or guardian has demonstrated the capacity and ability both to complete the objectives of his or her treatment plan and to provide for the child's safety, protection, physical and emotional well-being, and special needs.

The court shall inform the parent or guardian that if the child cannot be returned home by the next permanency review hearing, a proceeding pursuant to Section 366.36 may be instituted. The court shall not order that a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 be held unless there is clear and convincing evidence that reasonable services have been provided or offered to the parent or guardian.

(2) Order that the child remain in long-term foster care, but only if the court finds by clear and convincing evidence, based upon the evidence already presented to it, including a recommendation by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency, that there is a compelling reason for determining that a hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26 is not in the best interest of the child because the child is not a proper subject for adoption and has no one willing to accept legal guardianship. For purposes of this section, a recommendation by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency that adoption is not in the best interest of the child shall constitute a compelling reason for the court's determination. That recommendation shall be based on the present circumstances of the child and shall not preclude a different recommendation at a later date if the child's circumstances change.

(3) Order that a hearing be held within 120 days, pursuant to Section 366.26, if there is clear and convincing evidence that reasonable services have been provided or offered to the parents.

Evidence of any or all of the following circumstances shall not, in and of themselves, be deemed a failure to provide or offer reasonable services:

(A) The child has been placed with a foster family that is eligible to adopt a child, or has been placed in a preadoptive home.

(B) The case plan includes services to achieve legal permanence for the child if efforts to reunify fail.

(C) Services to achieve legal permanence for the child, if efforts to reunify fail, are provided concurrently with services to reunify the family.

(h) In any case in which the court orders that a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 shall be held, it shall also order the termination of reunification services to the parent. The court shall continue to permit the parent to visit the child pending the hearing unless it finds that visitation would be detrimental to the child.

(i) Whenever a court orders that a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 shall be held, it shall direct the agency supervising the child and the licensed county adoption agency, or the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency in counties that are not served by a county adoption agency, to prepare an assessment that shall include:

(1) Current search efforts for an absent parent or parents.

(2) A review of the amount of and nature of any contact between the child and his or her parents and other members of his or her extended family since the time of placement. Although the extended family of each child shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, "extended family" for the purpose of this paragraph shall include, but not be limited to, the child's siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

(3) An evaluation of the child's medical, developmental, scholastic, mental, and emotional status.

(4) A preliminary assessment of the eligibility and commitment of any identified prospective adoptive parent or guardian, particularly the caretaker, to include a social history including screening for criminal records and prior referrals for child abuse or neglect, the capability to meet the child's needs, and the understanding of the legal and financial rights and responsibilities of adoption and guardianship. If a proposed guardian is a relative of the minor, and the relative was assessed for foster care placement of the minor prior to January 1, 1998, the assessment shall also consider, but need not be limited to, all of the factors specified in subdivision (a) of Section 361.3.

(5) The relationship of the child to any identified prospective adoptive parent or guardian, the duration and character of the relationship, the motivation for seeking adoption or guardianship, and a statement from the child concerning placement and the adoption or guardianship, unless the child's age or physical, emotional, or other condition precludes his or her meaningful response, and if so, a description of the condition.

(6) An analysis of the likelihood that the child will be adopted if parental rights are terminated.

(j) If, at any hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26, a guardianship is established for the minor with a relative, the relative shall be eligible for aid under the Kin-GAP program as provided in Article 4.5 (commencing with Section 11360) of Chapter 2 of Part 3 of Division 9.

(k) As used in this section, "relative" means an adult who is related to the minor by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words "great," "great-great," or "grand," or the spouse of any of those persons even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution.

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 366.22

366.22. (a) When a case has been continued pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (g) of Section 366.21, the permanency review hearing shall occur within 18 months after the date the child was originally removed from the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian. The court shall order the return of the child to the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian unless the court finds, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the return of the child to his or her parent or guardian would create a substantial risk of detriment to the safety, protection, or physical or emotional well-being of the child. The social worker shall have the burden of establishing that detriment. The failure of the parent or guardian to participate regularly in court-ordered treatment programs shall be prima facie evidence that return would be detrimental. In making its determination, the court shall review and consider the social worker's report and recommendations and the report and recommendations of any child advocate appointed pursuant to Section 356.5; shall consider the efforts or progress, or both, demonstrated by the parent or guardian and

the extent to which he or she availed himself or herself of services provided; and shall make appropriate findings pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 366.

Evidence of any or all of the following circumstances shall not, in and of themselves, be deemed a failure to provide or offer reasonable services:

(1) The child has been placed with a foster family that is eligible to adopt a child, or has been placed in a preadoptive home.

(2) The case plan includes services to achieve legal permanence for the child if efforts to reunify fail.

(3) Services to achieve legal permanence for the child, if efforts to reunify fail, are provided concurrently with services to reunify the family.

Whether or not the child is returned to his or her parent or guardian, the court shall specify the factual basis for its decision.

If the child is not returned to a parent or guardian, the court shall specify the factual basis for its conclusion that return would be detrimental. If the child is not returned to a parent or guardian at the permanency review hearing, the court shall order that a hearing be held pursuant to Section 366.26 in order to determine whether adoption, guardianship, or long-term foster care is the most appropriate plan for the child. However, if the court finds by clear and convincing evidence, based on the evidence already presented to it, including a recommendation by the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency, that there is a compelling reason, as described in paragraph (2) of subdivision (g) of Section 366.21, for determining that a hearing held under Section 366.26 is not in the best interest of the child because the child is not a proper subject for adoption and has no one willing to accept legal guardianship, then the court may, only under these circumstances, order that the child remain in long-term foster care. The hearing shall be held no later than 120 days from the date of the permanency review hearing. The court shall also order termination of reunification services to the parent. The court shall continue to permit the parent to visit the child unless it finds that visitation would be detrimental to the child. The court shall determine whether reasonable services have been offered or provided to the parent or guardian.

(b) Whenever a court orders that a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 shall be held, it shall direct the agency supervising the child and the licensed county adoption agency, or the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency in counties that are not served by a county adoption agency, to prepare an assessment that shall include:

(1) Current search efforts for an absent parent or parents.

(2) A review of the amount of and nature of any contact between the child and his or her parents and other members of his or her extended family since the time of placement. Although the extended family of each child shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, "extended family" for the purposes of this paragraph shall include, but not be limited to, the child's siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

(3) An evaluation of the child's medical, developmental, scholastic, mental, and emotional status.

(4) A preliminary assessment of the eligibility and commitment of any identified prospective adoptive parent or guardian, particularly the caretaker, to include a social history including screening for criminal records and prior referrals for child abuse or neglect, the capability to meet the child's needs, and the understanding of the legal and financial rights and responsibilities of adoption and guardianship. If a proposed guardian is a relative of the minor, and the relative was assessed for foster care placement of the minor prior to January 1, 1998, the assessment shall also consider, but need not be limited to, all of the factors specified in subdivision (a) of Section 361.3.

(5) The relationship of the child to any identified prospective adoptive parent or guardian, the duration and character of the relationship, the motivation for seeking adoption or guardianship, and a statement from the child concerning placement and the adoption or guardianship, unless the child's age or physical, emotional, or other condition precludes his or her meaningful response, and if so, a description of the condition.

(6) An analysis of the likelihood that the child will be adopted if parental rights are terminated.

(c) This section shall become operative January 1, 1999. If at any hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26, a guardianship is established for the minor with a relative, the relative shall be eligible for aid under the Kin-GAP program as provided in Article 4.5 (commencing with Section 11360) of Chapter 2 of Part 3 of Division 9.

(d) As used in this section, "relative" means an adult who is related to the minor by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words "great," "great-great," or "grand," or the spouse of any of those persons even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution.

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 366.26

366.26. (a) This section applies to children who are adjudged dependent children of the juvenile court pursuant to subdivision (c) of Section 360. The procedures specified herein are the exclusive procedures for conducting these hearings; Part 2 (commencing with Section 3020) of Division 8 of the Family Code is not applicable to these proceedings. Section 8714.7 of the Family Code is applicable and available to all dependent children meeting the requirements of that section. For children who are adjudged dependent children of the juvenile court pursuant to subdivision (c) of Section 360, this section and Sections 8604, 8605, 8606, and 8700 of the Family Code and Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 7660) of Part 3 of Division 12 of the Family Code specify the exclusive procedures for permanently terminating parental rights with regard to, or establishing legal guardianship of, the child while the child is a dependent child of the juvenile court.

(b) At the hearing, that shall be held in juvenile court for all children who are dependents of the juvenile court, the court, in order to provide stable, permanent homes for these children, shall review the report as specified in Section 361.5, 366.21, or 366.22, shall indicate that the court has read and considered it, shall receive other evidence that the parties may present, and then shall make findings and orders in the following order of preference:

(1) Terminate the rights of the parent or parents and order that the child be placed for adoption and, upon the filing of a petition for adoption in the juvenile court, order that a hearing be set. The court shall proceed with the adoption after the appellate rights of the natural parents have been exhausted.

(2) On making a finding under paragraph (3) of subdivision (c), identify adoption as the permanent placement goal and order that efforts be made to locate an appropriate adoptive family for the child within a period not to exceed 180 days.

(3) Appoint a legal guardian for the child and order that letters of guardianship issue.

(4) Order that the child be placed in long-term foster care, subject to the periodic review of the juvenile court under Section 366.3.

In choosing among the above alternatives the court shall proceed pursuant to subdivision (c).

(c) (1) If the court determines, based on the assessment provided as ordered under subdivision (i) of Section 366.21 or subdivision (b) of Section 366.22, and any other relevant evidence, by a clear and convincing standard, that it is likely the child will be adopted, the court shall terminate parental rights and order the child placed for adoption. The fact that the child is not yet placed in a pre-adoptive home nor with a relative or foster family who is prepared to adopt the child, shall not constitute a basis for the court to conclude that it is not likely the child will be adopted. A finding under subdivision (b) or paragraph (1) of subdivision (e) of Section 361.5 that reunification services shall not be offered, under subdivision (e) of Section 366.21 that the whereabouts of a parent have been unknown for six months or that the parent has failed to visit or contact the child for six months or that the parent has been convicted of a felony indicating parental unfitness, or, under Section 366.21 or 366.22, that the court has continued to remove the child from the custody of the parent or guardian and has terminated reunification services, shall constitute a sufficient basis for termination of parental rights unless the court finds a compelling reason for determining that termination would be detrimental to the child due to one or more of the following circumstances:

(A) The parents or guardians have maintained regular visitation and contact with the child and the child would benefit from continuing the relationship.

(B) A child 12 years of age or older objects to termination of parental rights.

(C) The child is placed in a residential treatment facility, adoption is unlikely or undesirable, and continuation of parental rights will not prevent finding the child a permanent family placement if the parents cannot resume custody when residential care is no longer needed.

(D) The child is living with a relative or foster parent who is unable or unwilling to adopt the child because of exceptional circumstances, that do not include an unwillingness to accept legal or

financial responsibility for the child, but who is willing and capable of providing the child with a stable and permanent environment and the removal of the child from the physical custody of his or her relative or foster parent would be detrimental to the emotional well-being of the child. This subparagraph does not apply to any child who is living with a non relative and who is either (i) under six years of age or (ii) a member of a sibling group where at least one child is under six years of age and the siblings are, or should be, permanently placed together.

If the court finds that termination of parental rights would be detrimental to the child pursuant to subparagraph (A), (B), (C), or (D), it shall state its reasons in writing or on the record.

(2) The court shall not terminate parental rights if at each and every hearing at which the court was required to consider reasonable efforts or services, the court has found that reasonable efforts were not made or that reasonable services were not offered or provided.

(3) If the court finds that termination of parental rights would not be detrimental to the child pursuant to paragraph (1) and that the child has a probability for adoption but is difficult to place for adoption and there is no identified or available prospective adoptive parent, the court may identify adoption as the permanent placement goal and without terminating parental rights, order that efforts be made to locate an appropriate adoptive family for the child within a period not to exceed 180 days. During this 180-day period, the public agency responsible for seeking adoptive parents for each child shall, to the extent possible, contact other private and public adoption agencies regarding the availability of the child for adoption. During the 180-day period, the public agency shall conduct the search for adoptive parents in the same manner as prescribed for children in Sections 8708 and 8709 of the Family Code. At the expiration of this period, another hearing shall be held and the court shall proceed pursuant to paragraph (1), (3), or (4) of subdivision (b). For purposes of this section, a child may only be found to be difficult to place for adoption if there is no identified or available prospective adoptive parent for the child because of the child's membership in a sibling group, or the presence of a diagnosed medical, physical, or mental handicap, or the child is the age of seven years or more.

(4) If the court finds that adoption of the child or termination of parental rights is not in the best interest of the child, because one of the conditions in subparagraph (A), (B), (C), or (D) of paragraph (1) or in paragraph (2) applies, the court shall either order that the present caretakers or other appropriate persons shall become legal guardians of the child or order that the child remain in long-term foster care. Legal guardianship shall be considered before long-term foster care, if it is in the best interests of the child and if a suitable guardian can be found. When the child is living with a relative or a foster parent who is willing and capable of providing a stable and permanent environment, but not willing to become a legal guardian, the child shall not be removed from the home if the court finds the removal would be seriously detrimental to the emotional well-being of the child because the child has substantial psychological ties to the relative caretaker or foster parents. The court shall also make an order for visitation with the parents or guardians unless the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the visitation would be detrimental to the physical or emotional well-being of the child.

(5) If the court finds that the child should not be placed for adoption, that legal guardianship shall not be established, and that there are no suitable foster parents except exclusive-use homes available to provide the child with a stable and permanent environment, the court may order the care, custody, and control of the child transferred from the county welfare department to a licensed foster family agency. The court shall consider the written recommendation of the county welfare director regarding the suitability of the transfer. The transfer shall be subject to further court orders.

The licensed foster family agency shall place the child in a suitable licensed or exclusive-use home which has been certified by the agency as meeting licensing standards. The licensed foster family agency shall be responsible for supporting the child and for providing appropriate services to the child, including those services ordered by the court. Responsibility for the support of the child shall not, in and of itself, create liability on the part of the foster family agency to third persons injured by the child. Those children whose care, custody, and control are transferred to a foster family agency shall not be eligible for foster care maintenance payments or child welfare services, except for emergency response services pursuant to Section 16504.

(d) The proceeding for the appointment of a guardian for a child who is a dependent of the juvenile court shall be in the juvenile court. If the court finds pursuant to this section that legal guardianship is the appropriate permanent plan, it shall appoint the legal guardian and issue letters of guardianship. The assessment prepared pursuant to subdivision (g) of Section 361.5, subdivision (i) of

Section 366.21, and subdivision (b) of Section 366.22 shall be read and considered by the court prior to the appointment, and this shall be reflected in the minutes of the court. The person preparing the assessment may be called and examined by any party to the proceeding.

(e) The proceeding for the adoption of a child who is a dependent of the juvenile court shall be in the juvenile court if the court finds pursuant to this section that adoption is the appropriate permanent plan and the petition for adoption is filed in the juvenile court. Upon the filing of a petition for adoption, the juvenile court shall order that an adoption hearing be set. The court shall proceed with the adoption after the appellate rights of the natural parents have been exhausted. The full report required by Section 8715 of the Family Code shall be read and considered by the court prior to the adoption and this shall be reflected in the minutes of the court. The person preparing the report may be called and examined by any party to the proceeding. It is the intent of the Legislature, pursuant to this subdivision, to give potential adoptive parents the option of filing in the juvenile court the petition for the adoption of a child who is a dependent of the juvenile court. Nothing in this section is intended to prevent the filing of a petition for adoption in any other court as permitted by law, instead of in the juvenile court.

(f) At the beginning of any proceeding pursuant to this section, if the child or the parents are not being represented by previously retained or appointed counsel, the court shall proceed as follows:

(1) The court shall consider whether the interests of the child require the appointment of counsel. If the court finds that the interests of the child do require this protection, the court shall appoint counsel to represent the child. If the court finds that the interests of the child require the representation of counsel, counsel shall be appointed whether or not the child is able to afford counsel. The child shall not be present in court unless the child or the child's counsel so requests or the court so orders.

(2) If a parent appears without counsel and is unable to afford counsel, the court shall appoint counsel for the parent, unless this representation is knowingly and intelligently waived. The same counsel shall not be appointed to represent both the child and his or her parent. The public defender or private counsel may be appointed as counsel for the parent.

(3) Private counsel appointed under this section shall receive a reasonable sum for compensation and expenses, the amount of which shall be determined by the court. The amount shall be paid by the real parties in interest, other than the child, in any proportions the court deems just. However, if the court finds that any of the real parties in interest are unable to afford counsel, the amount shall be paid out of the general fund of the county.

(g) The court may continue the proceeding for not to exceed 30 days as necessary to appoint counsel, and to enable counsel to become acquainted with the case.

(h) At all proceedings under this section, the court shall consider the wishes of the child and shall act in the best interests of the child.

The testimony of the child may be taken in chambers and outside the presence of the child's parent or parents if the child's parent or parents are represented by counsel, the counsel is present, and any of the following circumstances exist:

- (1) The court determines that testimony in chambers is necessary to ensure truthful testimony.
- (2) The child is likely to be intimidated by a formal courtroom setting.
- (3) The child is afraid to testify in front of his or her parent or parents.

After testimony in chambers, the parent or parents of the child may elect to have the court reporter read back the testimony or have the testimony summarized by counsel for the parent or parents.

The testimony of a child also may be taken in chambers and outside the presence of the guardian or guardians of a child under the circumstances specified in this subdivision.

(i) Any order of the court permanently terminating parental rights under this section shall be conclusive and binding upon the child, upon the parent or parents and upon all other persons who have been served with citation by publication or otherwise as provided in this chapter. After making the order, the court shall have no power to set aside, change, or modify it, but nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the right to appeal the order.

(j) If the court, by order or judgment declares the child free from the custody and control of both parents, or one parent if the other does not have custody and control, the court shall at the same time order the child referred to the State Department of Social Services or a licensed adoption agency for adoptive placement by the agency. However, no petition for adoption may be granted until the appellate rights of the natural parents have been exhausted. The State Department of Social Services or licensed adoption agency shall be responsible for the custody and supervision of the child and shall be entitled to the

exclusive care and control of the child at all times until a petition for adoption is granted. With the consent of the agency, the court may appoint a guardian of the child, who shall serve until the child is adopted.

(k) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the application of any person who, as a relative caretaker or foster parent, has cared for a dependent child for whom the court has approved a permanent plan for adoption, or who has been freed for adoption, shall be given preference with respect to that child over all other applications for adoptive placement if the agency making the placement determines that the child has substantial emotional ties to the relative caretaker or foster parent and removal from the relative caretaker or foster parent would be seriously detrimental to the child's emotional well-being.

As used in this subdivision, "preference" means that the application shall be processed and, if satisfactory, the family study shall be completed before the processing of the application of any other person for the adoptive placement of the child.

(l) (1) An order by the court that a hearing pursuant to this section be held is not appealable at any time unless all of the following applies:

(A) A petition for extraordinary writ review was filed in a timely manner.

(B) The petition substantively addressed the specific issues to be challenged and supported that challenge by an adequate record.

(C) The petition for extraordinary writ review was summarily denied or otherwise not decided on the merits.

(2) Failure to file a petition for extraordinary writ review within the period specified by rule, to substantively address the specific issues challenged, or to support that challenge by an adequate record shall preclude subsequent review by appeal of the findings and orders made pursuant to this section.

(3) The Judicial Council shall adopt rules of court, effective January 1, 1995, to ensure all of the following:

(A) A trial court, after issuance of an order directing a hearing pursuant to this section be held, shall advise all parties of the requirement of filing a petition for extraordinary writ review as set forth in this subdivision in order to preserve any right to appeal in these issues. This notice shall be made orally to a party if they are present at the time of the making of the order or by first-class mail by the clerk of the court to the last known address of a party not present at the time of the making of the order.

(B) The prompt transmittal of the records from the trial court to the appellate court.

(C) That adequate time requirements for counsel and court personnel exist to implement the objective of this subdivision.

(D) That the parent or guardian, or their trial counsel or other counsel, is charged with the responsibility of filing a petition for extraordinary writ relief pursuant to this subdivision.

(4) The intent of this subdivision is to do both of the following:

(A) Make every reasonable attempt to achieve a substantive and meritorious review by the appellate court within the time specified in Sections 366.21 and 366.22 for holding a hearing pursuant to this section.

(B) Encourage the appellate court to determine all writ petitions filed pursuant to this subdivision on their merits.

(5) This subdivision shall only apply to cases in which an order to set a hearing pursuant to this section is issued on or after January 1, 1995.

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 366.3

366.3. (a) If a juvenile court orders a permanent plan of adoption or legal guardianship pursuant to Section 360 or 366.26, the court shall retain jurisdiction over the child until the child is adopted or the legal guardianship is established. The status of the child shall be reviewed every six months to ensure that the adoption or guardianship is completed as expeditiously as possible. When the adoption of the child has been granted, the court shall terminate its jurisdiction over the child. Following establishment of a legal guardianship, the court may continue jurisdiction over the child as a dependent child of the juvenile court following the establishment of a legal guardianship or may terminate its dependency jurisdiction and retain jurisdiction over the child as a ward of the guardianship, as authorized by Section 366.4. If, however, a relative of the child is appointed the legal guardian of the child and the child has been placed

with the relative for at least 12 months, the court shall, except upon a finding of exceptional circumstances, terminate its dependency jurisdiction and retain jurisdiction over the child as a ward of the guardianship, as authorized by Section 366.4. Following a termination of parental rights the parent or parents shall not be a party to, or receive notice of, any subsequent proceedings regarding the child.

(b) If the court has dismissed dependency jurisdiction following the establishment of a legal guardianship, or no dependency jurisdiction attached because of the granting of a legal guardianship pursuant to Section 360, and the legal guardianship is subsequently revoked or otherwise terminated, the county department of social services or welfare department shall notify the juvenile court of this fact. The court may vacate its previous order dismissing dependency jurisdiction over the child.

Notwithstanding Section 1601 of the Probate Code, the proceedings to terminate a guardianship which has been granted pursuant to Section 360 or 366.26 shall be held in the juvenile court, unless the termination is due to the emancipation or adoption of the child. Prior to the hearing on a petition to terminate guardianship pursuant to this paragraph, the court shall order the county department of social services or welfare department to prepare a report, for the court's consideration, that shall include an evaluation of whether the child could safely remain in the guardian's home, without terminating the guardianship, if services were provided to the child or guardian. If applicable, the report shall also identify recommended services to maintain the guardianship and set forth a plan for providing those services. If the petition to terminate guardianship is granted, the juvenile court may resume dependency jurisdiction over the child, and may order the county department of social services or welfare department to develop a new permanent plan, which shall be presented to the court within 60 days of the termination. If no dependency jurisdiction has attached, the social worker shall make any investigation he or she deems necessary to determine whether the child may be within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, as provided in Section 328.

Unless the parental rights of the child's parent or parents have been terminated, they shall be notified that the guardianship has been revoked or terminated and shall be entitled to participate in the new permanency planning hearing. The court shall try to place the child in another permanent placement. At the hearing, the parents may be considered as custodians but the child shall not be returned to the parent or parents unless they prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that reunification is the best alternative for the child. The court may, if it is in the best interests of the child, order that reunification services again be provided to the parent or parents.

(c) If, following the establishment of a legal guardianship, the county welfare department becomes aware of changed circumstances that indicate adoption may be an appropriate plan for the child, the department shall so notify the court. The court may vacate its previous order dismissing dependency jurisdiction over the child and order that a hearing be held pursuant to Section 366.26 to determine whether adoption or continued guardianship is the most appropriate plan for the child. The hearing shall be held no later than 120 days from the date of the order. Whenever the court orders that a hearing shall be held pursuant to Section 366.26, the court shall direct the agency supervising the child and the licensed county adoption agency, or the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency in counties that are not served by a county adoption agency, to prepare an assessment under subdivision(b) of Section 366.22.

(d) If the child is in a placement other than the home of a legal guardian and jurisdiction has not been dismissed, the status of the child shall be reviewed at least every six months. The review of the status of a child for whom the court has ordered parental rights terminated and who has been ordered placed for adoption shall be conducted by the court. The review of the status of a child for whom the court has not ordered parental rights terminated and who has not been ordered placed for adoption may be conducted by the court or an appropriate local agency. The court shall conduct the review under the following circumstances:

- (1) Upon the request of the child's parents or guardians.
- (2) Upon the request of the child.
- (3) It has been 12 months since a hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26 or an order that the minor remain in long-term foster care pursuant to Section 366.21, 366.22, 366.26, or subdivision (f).
- (4) It has been 12 months since a review was conducted by the court.

(e) Except as provided in subdivision (f), at the review held every six months pursuant to subdivision (d), the reviewing body shall inquire about the progress being made to provide a permanent home for the child, shall consider the safety of the child, and shall determine all of the following:

- (1) The appropriateness of the placement.
- (2) The continuing appropriateness and extent of compliance with the permanent plan for the child.
- (3) The extent of compliance with the child welfare services case plan.
- (4) The adequacy of services provided to the child.
- (5) For a child who is 16 years of age or older, the services needed to assist the child to make the transition from foster care to independent living.

Each licensed foster family agency shall submit reports for each child in its care, custody, and control to the court concerning the continuing appropriateness and extent of compliance with the child's permanent plan, the extent of compliance with the case plan, and the type and adequacy of services provided to the child.

Unless their parental rights have been permanently terminated, the parent or parents of the child are entitled to receive notice of, and participate in, those hearings. It shall be presumed that continued care is in the best interests of the child, unless the parent or parents prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that further efforts at reunification are the best alternative for the child. In those cases, the court may order that further reunification services to return the child to a safe home environment be provided to the parent or parents for a period not to exceed six months.

(f) At the review conducted by the court and held at least every six months, regarding a child for whom the court has ordered parental rights terminated and who has been ordered placed for adoption, the county welfare department shall prepare and present to the court a report describing the following:

- (1) The child's present placement.
- (2) The child's current physical, mental, emotional, and educational status.
- (3) Whether the child has been placed with a prospective adoptive parent or parents.
- (4) Whether an adoptive placement agreement has been signed and filed.
- (5) The progress of the search for an adoptive placement if one has not been identified.
- (6) Any impediments to the adoption or the adoptive placement.
- (7) The anticipated date by which the child will be adopted, or placed in an adoptive home.
- (8) The anticipated date by which an adoptive placement agreement will be signed.
- (9) Recommendations for court orders that will assist in the placement of the child for adoption or in the finalization of the adoption. The court shall make appropriate orders to protect the stability of the child and to facilitate and expedite the permanent placement and adoption of the child.

(g) At the review held for a child in long-term foster placement and for whom 12 months have elapsed since a hearing at which the child was ordered into long-term foster care, the court shall consider all permanency planning options for the child including whether the child should be returned to the home of the parent, placed for adoption, or appointed a legal guardian, or whether the child should remain in long-term foster care. The court shall order that a hearing be held pursuant to Section 366.26 unless it determines by clear and convincing evidence, that there is a compelling reason for determining that a hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26 is not in the best interest of the child because the child is not a proper subject for adoption or that there is no one willing to accept legal guardianship. If it is unlikely that the child will be adopted or one of the conditions described in paragraph(1) of subdivision (c) of Section 366.26 applies, that fact shall constitute a compelling reason for purposes of this subdivision. Only upon that determination may the court order that the child remain in long-term foster care, without holding a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26.

(h) If, as authorized by subdivision (f), the court orders a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26, the court shall direct the agency supervising the child and the licensed county adoption agency, or the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency in counties that are not served by a county adoption agency, to prepare an assessment as provided for in subdivision (i) of Section 366.21 or subdivision (b) of Section 366.22. A hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26 shall be held no later than 120 days from the date of the 12-month review at which it is ordered, and at that hearing the court shall determine whether adoption, guardianship, or long-term foster care is the most appropriate plan for the child.

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16501.1

16501.1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that the foundation and central unifying tool in child welfare services is the case plan.

(b) The Legislature further finds and declares that a case plan ensures that the child receives protection and safe and proper care and case management, and that services are provided to the child and parents or other caretakers as appropriate in order to improve conditions in the parent's home, to facilitate the safe return of the child to a safe home or the permanent placement of the child, and to address the needs of the child while in foster care. A case plan shall be based upon the principles of this section and shall document that a preplacement assessment of the service needs of the child and family, and preplacement preventive services, have been provided, and that reasonable efforts to prevent out-of-home placement have been made. In determining the reasonable services to be offered or provided, the child's health and safety shall be the paramount concerns. Reasonable services shall be offered or provided to make it possible for a child to return to a safe home environment, unless, pursuant to subdivisions (b) and (e) of Section 361.5, the court determines that reunification services shall not be provided. If reasonable services are not ordered, or are terminated, reasonable efforts shall be made to place the child in a timely manner in accordance with the permanent plan and to complete all steps necessary to finalize the permanent placement of the child.

(c) When out-of-home placement is used to attain case plan goals, the decision regarding choice of placement shall be based upon selection of a safe setting that is the least restrictive or most familylike and the most appropriate setting that is available and in close proximity to the parent's home, consistent with the selection of the environment best suited to meet the child's special needs and best interest, or both. The selection shall consider, in order of priority, placement with relatives, tribal members, and foster family, group care, and residential treatment pursuant to Section 7950 of the Family Code.

(d) A written case plan shall be completed within 30 days of the initial removal of the child or of the in-person response required under subdivision (f) of Section 16501 if the child has not been removed from his or her home, or by the date of the dispositional hearing pursuant to Section 358, whichever occurs first. The case plan shall be updated, as the service needs of the child and family dictate. At a minimum, the case plan shall be updated in conjunction with each status review hearing conducted pursuant to Section 366.21, and the hearing conducted pursuant to Section 366.26, but no less frequently than once every six months. Each updated case plan shall include a description of the services that have been provided to the child under the plan and an evaluation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of those services.

(e) The child welfare services case plan shall be comprehensive enough to meet the juvenile court dependency proceedings requirements pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 300) of Chapter 2 of Part 1 of Division 2.

(f) The case plan shall be developed as follows:

(1) The case plan shall be based upon an assessment of the circumstances that required child welfare services intervention.

(2) The case plan shall identify specific goals and the appropriateness of the planned services in meeting those goals.

(3) The case plan shall identify the original allegations of abuse or neglect, as defined in Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 11164) of Chapter 2 of Title 1 of Part 4 of the Penal Code, or the conditions cited as the basis for declaring the child a dependent of the court pursuant to Section 300, or all of these, and the other precipitating incidents that led to child welfare services intervention.

(4) The case plan shall include a description of the schedule of the social worker contacts with the child and the family or other caretakers. The frequency of these contacts shall be in accordance with regulations adopted by the State Department of Social Services. If the child has been placed in foster care out-of-state, the county social worker or a social worker on the staff of the social service agency in the state in which the child has been placed shall visit the child in a foster family home or the home of a relative at least every 12 months and submit a report to the court on each visit. For children in out-of-state group home facilities, visits shall be conducted at least monthly, pursuant to Section 16516.5.

(5) When out-of-home services are used, the frequency of contact between the natural parents or legal guardians and the child shall be specified in the case plan. The frequency of those contacts shall reflect overall case goals, and consider other principles outlined in this section.

(6) When out-of-home placement is made, the case plan shall include documentation of the provisions specified in subdivisions (b), (c), and (d) of Section 16002.

(7) When out-of-home placement is made in a foster family home, group home or other child care institution that is either a substantial distance from the home of the child's parent or out-of-state, the case plan shall specify the reasons why that placement is in the best interest of the child. When an out-of-state group home placement is recommended or made, the case plan shall, in addition, specify compliance with Section 7911.1 of the Family Code.

(8) When out-of-home services are used, or when parental rights have been terminated and the case plan is placement for adoption, the case plan shall include a recommendation regarding the appropriateness of unsupervised visitation between the child and any of the child's siblings. This recommendation shall include a statement regarding the child's and the siblings' willingness to participate in unsupervised visitation. If the case plan includes a recommendation for unsupervised sibling visitation, the plan shall also note that information necessary to accomplish this visitation has been provided to the child or to the child's siblings.

(9) When out-of-home services are used and the goal is reunification, the case plan shall describe the services to be provided to assist in reunification and the services to be provided concurrently to achieve legal permanency if efforts to reunify fail.

(10) When out-of-home services are used, the child's case plan is subject to review at the first 12-month permanency hearing, and if the case plan is not adoptive placement, the case plan shall include documentation of the compelling reason or reasons why termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interest. A determination by the department when it is acting as an adoption agency or by a licensed adoption agency that it is unlikely that the child will be adopted, or that one of the conditions described in paragraph (1) of subdivision (c) of Section 366.26 applies, shall be deemed a compelling reason.

(11) (A) Parents and legal guardians shall have an opportunity to review the case plan, sign it whenever possible, and then shall receive a copy of the plan. In any voluntary service or placement agreement, the parents or legal guardians shall be required to review and sign the case plan. Whenever possible, parents and legal guardians shall participate in the development of the case plan.

(B) Parents and legal guardians shall be advised that, pursuant to Section 1228.1 of the Evidence Code, neither their signature on the child welfare services case plan nor their acceptance of any services prescribed in the child welfare services case plan shall constitute an admission of guilt or be used as evidence against the parent or legal guardian in a court of law. However, they shall also be advised that the parent's or guardian's failure to cooperate, except for good cause, in the provision of services specified in the child welfare services case plan may be used in any hearing held pursuant to Section 366.21 or 366.22 as evidence.

(12) The case plan shall be included in the court report and shall be considered by the court at the initial hearing and each review hearing. Modifications to the case plan made during the period between review hearings need not be approved by the court if the casework supervisor for that case determines that the modifications further the goals of the plan.

(13) When the case plan has as its goal for the child a permanent plan of adoption or placement in another permanent home, it shall include documentation of the steps the agency is taking to find an adoptive family or other permanent living arrangements for the child; to place the child with an adoptive family, an appropriate and willing relative, a legal guardian, or in another planned permanent living arrangement; and to finalize the adoption or legal guardianship. At a minimum, the documentation shall include child specific recruitment efforts, such as the use of state, regional, and national adoption exchanges, including electronic exchange systems, when the child has been freed for adoption.

(g) If the court finds, after considering the case plan, that unsupervised sibling visitation is appropriate and has been consented to, the court shall order that the child or the child's siblings, and the child's prospective adoptive parents, if applicable, be provided with information necessary to accomplish this visitation. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require or prohibit the social worker's facilitation, transportation, or supervision of visits between the child and his or her siblings.

(h) The case plan documentation on sibling placements required under this section shall not require modification of existing case plan forms until the Child Welfare Services Case Management System is implemented on a statewide basis.

(i) The department, in consultation with the County Welfare Directors Association and other advocates, shall develop standards and guidelines for a model relative placement search and assessment process based on the criteria established in Section 361.3. These guidelines shall be incorporated in the training described in Section 16206. These model standards and guidelines shall be developed by March 1, 1999.

Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16508.1

16508.1. (a) For every child who is in foster care, or who enters foster care, on or after January 1, 1999, and has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the social worker shall submit to the court a recommendation that the court set a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 for the purpose of terminating parental rights. The social worker shall concurrently initiate and describe a plan to identify, recruit, process and approve a qualified family for adoption of the child.

(b) The social worker is not required to submit the recommendation as described in subdivision (a) if any of the following applies:

(1) The case plan for the child has documented a compelling reason or reasons why it is unlikely that the child will be adopted, as determined by the department when it is acting as an adoption agency or by the licensed adoption agency, and therefore termination of parental rights would not be in the best interest of the child or that one of the conditions set forth in paragraph (1) of subdivision (c) of Section 366.26 applies.

(2) A hearing under Section 366.26 is already set.

(3) The court has found at the previous hearing under Section 366.21 that there is a substantial probability that the child will be returned to the child's home within the extended period of time permitted.

(4) The court has found at the previous hearing under Section 366.21 that reasonable reunification services have not been offered or provided.

(5) The court has found at each and every hearing at which the court was required to consider reasonable efforts or services that reasonable efforts were not made or that reasonable services were not offered or provided.

(c) A recommendation to the court pursuant to subdivision (a) shall not be made if the social worker documents in the case record a compelling reason why a hearing pursuant to Section 366.26 is not in the best interest of the child, or that reasonable efforts to safely return the child home are continuing consistent with the time period provided for in paragraph (1) of subdivision (g) of Section 366.21.

(d) Beginning January 1, 1999, the county welfare department shall implement a procedure for reviewing the application of this section to the case plans of all children who have been in foster care for 15 out of the most recent 22 months. The review shall proceed within the following timeframes:

(1) By July 1, 1999, one-third of the children shall have been reviewed, giving priority to children who have been in foster care the greatest length of time.

(2) By January 1, 2000, at least two-thirds of the children shall have been reviewed.

(3) By July 1, 2000, all children shall have been reviewed.

(e) For purposes of this section, a child shall be considered to have entered foster care on the earlier of the date of the jurisdictional hearing held pursuant to Section 356 or the date that is 60 days after the date on which the child was initially removed from the home of his or her parent or guardian.